SERMON,

DELIVERED IN THE

Catholick Baptist Meeting-House,

IN CUMBERLAND, R. I.

ON

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BY REUBEN POTTER, JUN.

PASTOR OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, IN SAID TOWN.

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SERMON.

PSALMS, C. 2.

"SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS: COME INTO HIS PRESENCE WITH SINGING."

NOTHING is more important in the worship of God, than a perfect knowledge of what it is made to consist. This knowledge cannot be obtained, but by having recourse to the Scriptures of Truth, which are given by the Divine Disposer, as a fund of religious instruction, every way capable to instruct us in the most minute parts of Christian and religious worship.

In embracing the subject now before us, two things are important:

1. A general and concise view of the service of God; and,
2. To prove, that singing constitutes a part of that service.

First. A general and concise view of the service of God.

Very different are the characters formed of religion, by its different professors, as well as by those who are unacquainted therewith.

Many are so insensible of its real nature, and the principles which it inculcates, as to suppose a person IRRELIGIOUS, if he be not bowed down with a seriousness which borders on a deeply affected melancholy. But the excellent precepts of our text, which dropt from the inspired lips of the son of Jesse, (a man after God's own heart,) teach us to serve the Lord with gladness.

Who can be sad and sorrowful, while he entertains an evidence in his heart, that he is made an heir of God, and a joint heir with Jesus Christ?

The Jews rejoiced by reason of having Abraham to their Father. Shall the believing Gentile be less joyful, while he has God to his immediate Father? The Apostle saith, rejoice for ever more.

Christ taught, that the approach of the bridegroom caused joy: then how much greater joy shall the presence of Christ give to his people, who are allied to him by ties incompara-

bly more strong, than those which cement the most ardent lovers? Yea, stronger than death!

How many have preferred the suffering of death, to the denial of Christ and his cause. Many, in the presence of their beloved companions and numerous offsprings, have been led to the fatal stake (viewing the gathering pile around them) and burned to ashes, without dropping a repentant tear.

While the powers of utterance remain, instead of a depression of spirits, or a down-cast visage (by reason of the gloomy scene around them) the renovating powers of Christ in the soul, enable them to rejoice, that they are accounted worthy (not only to believe on Christ) but to suffer death, manfully, in defence of his cause. They look at the heart-cheering promises of Christ, who said "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake:

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven."

To represent the service of God as slavery, is the height of absurdity. And to assume a character, evincing that we sustain a ponderous and galling yoke, is thus representing it. Christ said "take my yoke upon you, which is easy, and my burden, which is light; learn of me (who am meek and lowly in heart) and ye shall find *rest* to your souls."

Were we to describe the condition of the *slavish* professor, and compare his with the condition of the servant who is held in slavery by the most unfeeling master, we should, truly (judging from appearance) view a frightful similarity. Nothing can be more derogatory to the glory of God and his cause, than thus to throw the *sombre* mantle over religion, and divest it of all its winning graces and alluring charms.

There is no REST in slavish fear, yet filial fear embraces both love and fear, which are two conspicuous characteristicks in the Christian. Otherwise than this, we shall liken ourselves to a certain class of people, of whom the apostle spake—"who, through fear of death, were in bondage all their life-time."

Christ's injunction on his disciples was, that they should shine as lights in the world. But how can this be effected, otherwise, than by serving the Lord with *gladness*? The desires of most people are, to obtain that which will sweeten the ills of life, and decrease their infelicities. But if religion is worthy the character under which so many represent it, it can never answer these important ends; consequently, not desirable.

Suppose a man to be actually an heir to one of the richest mines in Peru, of which he has an undoubted assurance of coming, shortly, into possession, does not the recollection of his immense riches, fill his heart with gladness, and swell his soul with exstacies? If this be admitted, we will again ask, if the real Christian has not a greater cause to rejoice, on the realization, that he is now in possession of "durable riches and righteousness," and feels a hope (*which is an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast,*) that he shortly shall be a sharer in the indescribable glories, and beatifick joys of heaven, and be so transfixed (by a transition to immortality) as to enjoy this, as eternal as God shall exist?

What person when realizing all this, can refrain from serving the Lord with *gladness?* The language of his heart, must be, that the ways of God are pleasantness; and in full anticipation of heavenly joys, to which he expects shortly to arrive, he exclaims,

> "Death, like a narrow sea, divides
> The heavenly land from ours."

Solomon saith "draw me, we will run after thee, the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be *glad* and *rejoice* in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine."

Abraham, who lived many hundred years before Christ, while looking forward to the time when Christ would make his appearance in the flesh, received infinite pleasure. Therefore saith Christ, "your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was *glad.*"

We do not admit, that every carnal hilarity or gladness, is the service of God: for we should not rejoice in iniquity, but in the truth, and in the God of our salvation.

"There is a river, the streams whereof make *glad* the city of our God." While we belong to this city, taste of the *gladdening* streams, which, like the exhilarating wine of the kingdom, swells the soul with praise, under a due sense of the mercies of God, we can but say with Paul, "I REJOICE; yea, I will REJOICE." And with David, "the Lord reigneth: let the earth *rejoice*, let the multitude of isles *be glad* thereof; clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."

We hope that there are none so incorrigible, but on mature deliberation, would exercise a godly sorrow or repentance for their ingratitude to God, under the consideration that he has "not left himself without a witness, in that he did

good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

It is, therefore, obvious, that if the servants of God rejoice and serve him with *gladness*, that it does not militate against the sanctity of our holy religion. A procedure differing from this (in the servant of God,) is expressive of his fear that God will eventually consign him to the writhing pains of eternity. "Cast not away your confidence which has great recompence of reward." To say that God is *austere*, would be discouraging those who would feignedly enter into his service. And to say that the laws of his kingdom are *grievous*, would contradict the apostle, who said, "*I delight* in the law of God, after the inward man."

Therefore, would we say to those who have no delight in the service of God, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread; and your labour for that which satisfieth not: *hearken* diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul *delight* itself in fatness."

You, my brethren, have experienced that the way of the *transgressor* is hard—and that the devious paths of sin are *unpleasant*. On the other hand, you have found, that the way of God is strewed with the flowers of Christian delights—that you are presented with the Rose of Sharon, in bloom and beauty, together with golden incense and sweet-smelling myrrh. Then how can you but exclaim—how beautiful! How pleasant!! How delightful, are the ways of God!!! How charming is our beloved, the voice of whom, is as the dulcimer sweet. He feedeth among the lilies. We can but say with David, "Come, let us go up to the house of God."

Having proved, by scriptural deductions (however desultory our remarks may be) that the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and even Christ himself, taught that the service of God be done with *gladness* and joy.

We shall take our leave of this part of our subject, and show,

Secondly. That *singing* constitutes a part of the worship of God.

It is well known (to this congregation) that the prejudices of many against the introduction of singing into religious worship, are very great. These imbibed objections, some support by a pretence, that the spirit of God with which they are possessed, or *pretend* to be possessed, constrains them to exclude the practice of singing praise, vocally, from their worship. But can we, with propriety, admit a spirit to be from God which shall in any way *divert* our attention from the

Paul saith, "all scriptures are given by inspiration of God." Then what shall be consequent to God's enduing man with a *spirit*, which stands in direct opposition to the scriptural injunctions? Is it not representing God under the character of a fountain, which sends forth both *bitter* water and *sweet* at the same *place?*

Our text requires us to come into the presence of the Lord with singing.

In order fairly to discuss our subject, we shall have recourse to the Scriptures of divine truth, for our authority. And if we are able to prove the *practice* scriptural, then shall we be under necessity to condemn that *Spirit* which disproves it, as ANTI-CHRISTIAN.

The practice of singing is co-existent with the world. It appears that as soon as creation was organized, and its system completed, that then commenced the celebration of the praises of God by *singing*, Job, 38. 7. "When the morning stars sang together: and all the sons of God shouted for joy." There was the utmost order in the singing of the Israelites, after their deliverance from the Egyptian bondage, by their passage through the red sea.

Exodus, 15. 1. "Then sung Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." Here also, we have the first account of the women taking a part in Sacred Musick; "And Miriam the Prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels; and Miriam answered them, *Sing* unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously."

Barzillai. David's friend, refused the invitation of his king to return to Jerusalem, and pleaded as an excuse his incapacity for the pleasures of Musick. "I am this day four score years old; can I hear any more the voice of singing men and *singing women*. II. Sam. xix. 35. King Solomon, speaking of the experiment which he had made in search of pleasure, said, "I gat me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts." Eccle. ii. 8. In the court of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon were heard "the sound of the Cornet, Flute, Harp, Sackbut, Psaltery, Dulcimer and all kinds of Musick."

In many instances Musick was used for amusement and recreation. It was anciently used in the worship of God.

The song contained in Ex. xv. is called the song of Moses, which was continually sung throughout the prosperity of Is-

rael, to which was added the song of the lamb according to the language of John. Rev. xv. 2, 3. "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark. and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God."

And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb—saying, great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways thou King of Saints." These scriptures tend to show the manner of worship both in heaven and on earth. The latter is called a new song, Rev. xiv. 2, 3. "And I heard the voice of harpers, harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a NEW SONG before the THRONE, and before the four beasts, and before the Elders: and no man could learn that SONG but the HUNDRED AND FORTY AND FOUR THOUSAND which were redeemed from the earth. And they sung a NEW SONG, saying thou art worthy to take the Book, and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue and people, and nation."

If this be the practice of those who dwell in heaven, why not of those who dwell on earth? Has not Christ taught us to pray that the kingdom of God might come and his will be done, on earth as in heaven? If so, can we suppose that the celestial inhabitants swerve from the Divine will? certainly not. Then when we pray that the servants of the most high would sing on earth, as those do in heaven, is it rational that we should act in opposition to our prayers? Shall we cease to practise those things for which we are taught fervently to pray?

David saith. "Make a *joyful noise* unto God, all ye lands: *sing* forth the honour of his name, make his praise GLORIOUS."

Our Saviour, on the most solemn occasion introduced *singing*, even at his supper, which was instituted in commemoration of his death, "THEY SUNG A HYMN and went out." Is not the example of our Saviour then, highly worthy our imitation? How inconsistent is it to suppose that real *piety* will exclude Christ's examples from our observance, and render them unbinding on us! "These things ought not to be."

"Sing unto God, sing praises unto his name, extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name, JAH, (everlasting,) and rejoice before him." Psalms, lxviii. 3.

Many are officious to object against the use of Psalmody; but these objections are removed by the two corresponding

testimonies of David and Paul. David saith, "sing unto him, sing Psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works;" to which Paul agrees, by saying, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Col. iii. 16. See also Eph. v. 19.

These scriptures are plain, and conclusive; and no person can doubt them, unless they act under the influence of SUPERSTITION, or that which is equally erroneous.

Doctor Witherspoon saith, "Musick has always been esteemed one of the finest arts, and was originally used in the worship of God, yet when Musick is applied to the purposes of amusement only, it becomes wholly *contemptible*." We shall admit but few more testimonies on the subject. "O, sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day." Psalms, xcvi. 1, 2. To which we have Isaiah's concession, xxvi. 1, "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; we have a strong city: salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks."

The position taken, we have endeavoured to support by inspired authority. Notwithstanding the numerous testimonies which have been advanced, we regret that our short limits will not allow the admission of numerous authority, which for that reason, we must leave to rest in the recesses of the Holy Bible; which, if admitted, would conduce to a more thorough investigation of the subject. But if credit can be given to the authority already exhibited, we shall need no further evidence, but admit that it is indispensable for the servant of God to come into his presence with SINGING.

Then, to close our remarks, we offer their use, by addresses, 1st, to the Singers; and, 2d, to the Congregation.

TO THE SINGERS.

Respected Friends,

Your attention to our religious worship, and your endeavours to beautify our exercises with the harmony of your VOICES, demands the gratitude and respect of your minister, and the congregation.

While I do myself the pleasure of expressing my unfeigned acknowledgments, and tendering you my respect, for your excellent services, I shall, doubtless, have your indulgence to communicate my advice.

It is well known that you act a very conspicuous part in our exercises, which, has been shown in our foregoing remarks, to be both laudable and consistent with the Christian's duty.

While you salute our ears with the praises of God, may your hearts be congenial with your voices. Fired with seraphick strains, may those excellent precepts, to which you adapt your tuneful notes, be a subject of mature deliberation. While you industriously labour to harmonize your voices, may you study a harmonious and circumspect deportment in life, that, thereby the JARGON of vice and immorality, may not disorder your band, and render you unfit for the Master's use. But may you improve in every moral and social virtue.

"Only believe, and then sing on,
"Heaven is yours forever."

Remember your responsibility to God, and conduct yourselves accordingly. That at last you may join the immortal choir above—entering the NEW-JERUSALEM, passing the gates of PEARL—crowding her streets, and with noble and angelick strains, swell her TEMPLE with songs of praise, having each a harp of gold, join with kindred and enraptured spirits, to sing the SONG of—"WORTHY is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing."

TO THE CONGREGATION.

Friends and Brethren,

It is with the warmest emotions that your servant expresses his gratitude, on the recollection of the good attention you have given to DIVINE SERVICE, which he duly realizes, and reciprocates by acknowledgments.

The present discourse he humbly submits for your consideration, ardently desiring that it may conduce to your well-being.

It is important that you should be sensible that those objects which are of a terrestrial nature, are fading and transitory—"Those things which are *seen* are temporal, those things which are *not seen*, are eternal—"Cease to do evil, learn to do well." Life, like the burning taper, first illumines, then glimmers, and sinks into non-appearance! Prepare for death, for it will approach you ere long, with all its terrifick appendages. Repent of your sins, believe in Christ, and obey his gospel, that when you shall appear before "the JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST" to give an account "for the deeds done in the body," you may receive the soul-reviving PLAUDIT from "the judge of quick and dead, of "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you," which may the Lord grant for the REDEEMER'S sake.

AMEN.